

## University of Dundee

### Excite.ed

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# How to deliver excellence and equity in **Scottish Education**



Scottish  
Government  
[gov.scot](http://gov.scot)





# Foreword

**John Swinney MSP**  
Deputy First Minister, Cabinet Secretary  
for Education and Skills  
Scottish Government

“The Scottish Government wants our young people to have the confidence and skills to influence decisions around them, effectively participate in wider civic society and shape the future Scotland they want to live in.

We are committed to ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of decisions that affect them and we know from research that the participation of children and young people within their schools can have a significant impact on their attainment. This is why, as part of the Education Governance Review on delivering excellence and equity in Scottish education, we commissioned the **Excite.Ed** project.

With thanks to all the partners involved, including all the children and young people who took part, this report now offers a further evidence base that children and young people want more say in decisions that affect them both locally and nationally.

It is also warming to hear that our young people in Scotland have a strong focus on fairness and giving each individual an equal opportunity to do well.”

The **Excite.Ed** project was part of a review by the Scottish Government seeking views into ‘how to deliver excellence and equity in Scottish Education’.

The project partners Young Scot, Children in Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament delivered Excite.Ed between September 2016 and January 2017. **Excited.Ed** involved working with children and young people to understand their perspectives as experts of their own experience, and identify the changes needed in order for the Scottish Government to realise its ambition of an improved and fairer education system in Scotland.

A total of 27 engagements were delivered through workshops and classroom packs, which reached 789 children and young people. A national survey also received 639 responses.

A range of strong threads emerged from the findings and have been distilled to the following seven key areas for change:

**Increased Participation:** Pupils want to have more of a say in the decisions that affect them both locally and nationally.

**Equal access:** Young people want to have access to the same resources, opportunities and support across schools both in the classroom and between schools.

**Stress and mental health support:** Education can be stressful for young people, participants strongly suggested on a number of occasions that schools can do more to support their mental health.

**Relationships:** Young people saw negativity in the relationships between pupils, peers, teachers, parents, heads and government and thought these dynamics offered room for exploration.

**Feedback:** When being consulted or involved in decision making it is important that decision makers show that their input is valued and that they can affect change.

**Choice in the curriculum:** Young people want there to be more choice in the curriculum and see technology as a good way to support this.

**Extra-curricular opportunities:** Young people want to see the quality of engagement between schools and their local community improve and see this as a way to gain more extra-curricular opportunities.

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### About the Partners



#### Young Scot

Young Scot is the national youth information and citizenship charity, providing young people, aged 11 - 26, with a mixture of information, opportunities and incentives to help them become confident, informed and active citizens.



#### Children in Scotland

Children in Scotland is the collective voice for children, young people and families in Scotland, and organisations and businesses that have a significant positive impact on children's lives.



#### SYP

The Scottish Youth Parliament is the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. Our vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its children and young people. Our goal is to make this vision a reality, in order to ensure Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up.



# Mission statement

The **Excite.Ed** project kicked off in late September 2016. It focused on the governance review being undertaken by Scottish Government which is seeking to deliver excellence and equity in Scottish Education.

The **Excite.Ed** project was motivated by the defining mission of the Scottish Government to raise attainment and make demonstrable progress in closing the gap between those children and young people who are the least and the most disadvantaged.

The **Excite.Ed** project partners worked together through a range of direct engagement activities with children and young people to understand their perspective as experts of their own experience, and of the changes needed if ambitions for Scottish education are to be achieved.



## Areas of interest

At the start of the project the Scottish Government specified the following themes to begin the investigation:

**Governance:** How to enable more decisions about the things that happen in school to be decided by schools themselves.

**Equity:** Do children and young people think school is fair and the same for everyone?

**Empowering Children & Young People:** How involved are children and young people currently in the things that happen in the school?

**Community Involvement:** What are children and young people's views on how we can encourage more community involvement?

**Wider Support:** What are the transition points and how can young people be better supported both in and outside the classroom?

**Joining up/Clusters:** Do children and young people think schools can help other schools to do better?

# Methodology

## Kick Off



A kick-off event was held in October 2016 at Broughton High School, Edinburgh. This event brought the partners together with children and young people directly from the outset and used their insights to shape the rest of the engagement activity. The kick-off also generated significant buzz on social media via the project hashtag **#ExciteEdScot**.

A short video of the day was created and can be viewed at the following web address:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8d60fUG0Mk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8d60fUG0Mk)

## Engaging

### Workshops

The partners were responsible for individually delivering 14 different engagement sessions across Scotland. These sessions used the six areas of interest as a starting point before adapting through further discussion.

### Classroom Packs

Classroom packs were produced and distributed online. The classroom packs enabled schools and other youth organisations to deliver their own engagement sessions independently of the partners. A further 11 sessions were held using the classroom packs.

### Survey

An online survey developed from young people's ideas from the Kick-off event was hosted on Young Scot's Rewards platform.

## Analysis and Insight

### Analysis

The data generated throughout the project was analysed; defined a set of findings to be shared with participants at the final insight day.



### Insight Day

The final Insight Day was hosted at the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh on the 20th December 2016 alongside a virtual event in Shetland. Partners shared their findings and participants from earlier sessions were invited to build on these ideas and share them with senior decision makers, including the Deputy First Minister.





# Participants

Through the engagement sessions, classroom packs and survey, over 1000 young people contributed to the findings. This included a mix of primary and secondary school pupils, and pupils with additional support needs.

The 15 engagement sessions delivered by the partners involved 368 participants from 12 different local authorities spreading from the Scottish Borders up to the Shetland Islands.

The 11 sessions delivered using the classroom packs had a further 421 participants from seven local authorities. The online survey had a total of 639 responses (522 complete and 117 partial) from 30 different local authorities.

The project succeeded in targeting young people currently experiencing the education system and has brought in views from older young people with previous experience of progressing through the system.

The list on the right details the various groups of children and young people who participated in each of the activities



The online survey had a total of **639** responses (**522** complete and **117** partial) from **30** different local authorities.



## Workshops

LOCATION / GROUP	AREA	PARTICIPANTS	EDUCATION LEVEL
Broughton High School	Edinburgh	45	Primary, Secondary and older
MSYP Sitting	Inverclyde	16	Secondary
*Additional support needs group	West Lothian	5	Secondary
Linlithgow Academy – Pupil Council	West Lothian	12	Secondary
Lochgilphead	Argyll & Bute	20	Primary
Islesburgh Complex, Lerwick	Shetland	27	Secondary
*Additional support needs group	Fife	3	Secondary
*Advocacy group	Fife	7	Secondary and older
Mid & East Lothian Youth Council	Mid & East Lothian	20	Secondary
Knightswood Secondary Glasgow	Glasgow	25	Secondary
Scottish Borders Youth Voice	Scottish Borders	15	Secondary
MSYP sitting	Edinburgh	3	Secondary and older
Renfrewshire Youth Council	Renfrewshire	60	Secondary
Valley Primary School	Fife	20	Primary
Larbert High School	Falkirk	105	Secondary

Total = 368 children and young people

## Classroom Packs

LOCATION / GROUP	AREA	PARTICIPANTS	EDUCATION LEVEL
Linlithgow Primary	West Lothian	27	Primary
Oban High School	Argyle & Bute	170	Secondary
Lochgilphead	Argyle & Bute	15	Secondary
Tarbert Academy	Argyle & Bute	35	Secondary
*Youth project	Glasgow	6	Secondary
*Youth project	Glasgow	6	Primary
Inverclyde Youth Forum	Inverclyde	15	Secondary
Flora Stevenson Primary School	Edinburgh	44	Primary
Aberlady Primary School	East Lothian	19	Primary
Douglas Ewart High School	Dumfries & Galloway	60	Secondary
Athelstaneford Primary School	East Lothian	24	Primary

Total = 421 children and young people

\*Groups with less than 10 participants have had their specific group names removed to protect the anonymity of the children and young people involved.

### Survey Overview Total = 639

A total of 639 young people and children from 30 different local authorities took part in the survey.

Total engagements = 1428

# Insights from National Survey

The kick-off event brought the partners together with 45 children and young people who generated a lot of valuable insights to which inform project's wider engagement activity.



Below is a list of the kick off session's key insights. This includes the most significant barriers for young people in schools to get involved in decision-making as well as ideas to reduce these barriers.

These barriers and ideas were used to design the national survey completed by 639 young people across Scotland. Young people were asked to select all the ideas and barriers they agreed with.

## Barriers

Across Scotland young people feel that 'not having the confidence to speak out' was the most common barrier with 61.7% of participants checking this option. Following this, 50.8% thought 'speaking up is a waste of time as I don't feel like my thoughts would be taken seriously.'

The lowest selected barrier was 'Just not interested in inputting' with only 16.5% and 'There is no incentive or reward for getting involved' with 24%.

Barriers	No. of Selections
Not having the confidence to speak out	317
Speaking up is a waste of time as I don't feel like my thoughts would be taken seriously	261
Teachers and decision makers not being approachable	256
There is not enough support when you do share your thoughts	215
I don't know enough about how to get involved and what is going on	198
There is not a platform or route to speaking with the people who make decisions	194
I didn't think I was allowed	152
I am worried about what will happen if I do get involved	146
There are no stories of people who have succeeded in making change to inspire future young people	138
My friends don't take part in decision making	131
There is not an incentive or reward for getting involved	124
Just not interested in inputting	85



'A school voting system where all pupils can have a say' with **71.9%** of participants selecting this idea.



## Ideas

The results from the survey highlight that the most appealing idea for increasing young people's opportunities to make decisions in school was for 'a school voting system where all pupils can have a say', with 71.9% of participants selecting this idea.

This was followed by 52.4% for 'Involving pupils in the design of classes', 46.8% voted for 'Suggestion boxes in schools' and 44.4% for 'Students being allowed to help work on new improvement projects'. All ideas were checked by at least 29% of respondents.

Ideas	No. of Selections
A school voting system where all pupils can have a say	369
Involve pupils in the design of classes	269
Suggestion boxes in schools	240
Students allowed to help work on new improvement projects	228
A board of young people from across Scotland who are consulted on new changes that will affect them	217
Students actively encouraged to share ideas	209
A way to share ideas with your school and other schools	208
More opportunities for young people to speak in the communities about what matters to them	199
More of a conversational environment where young people can talk to teachers about changes	178
Student should be able to call teachers by their first name	163
Modern studies projects looking at how to improve the school/community	151
New national forum for young people to input on education policies	150





# National survey continued...

The national survey also asked a range of questions about how young people feel about getting involved in decision making and the improvement of education in Scotland. Young people were asked about six areas where they could have influence:

1

**Personal:**

what to eat, what to wear, what sports to play, when to leave for school, what I am going to do when I leave school.

2

**Personal Education:**

pick subjects to study, how you learn, how to behave.

3

**Class Education :**

what topics are tested, class rules, resources that are used, what teacher you get, trips.

4

**School:**

how school money is spent, changes to the school building, uniform.

5

**Community:**

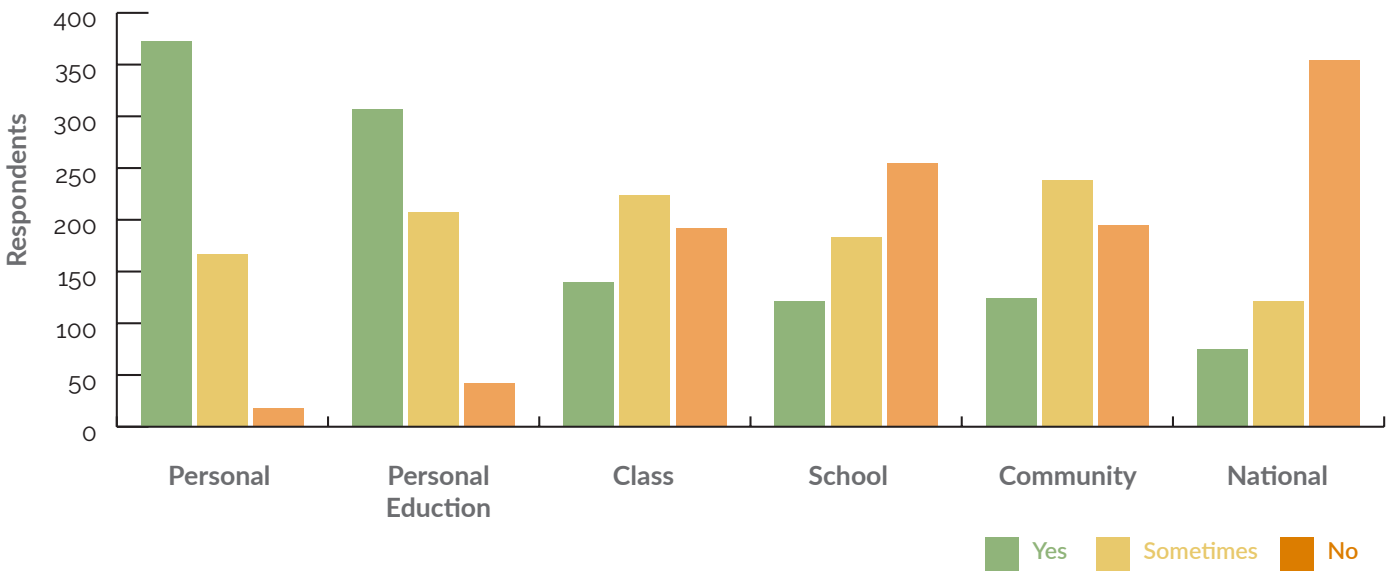
choosing which school you go to, what happens in your local area.

6

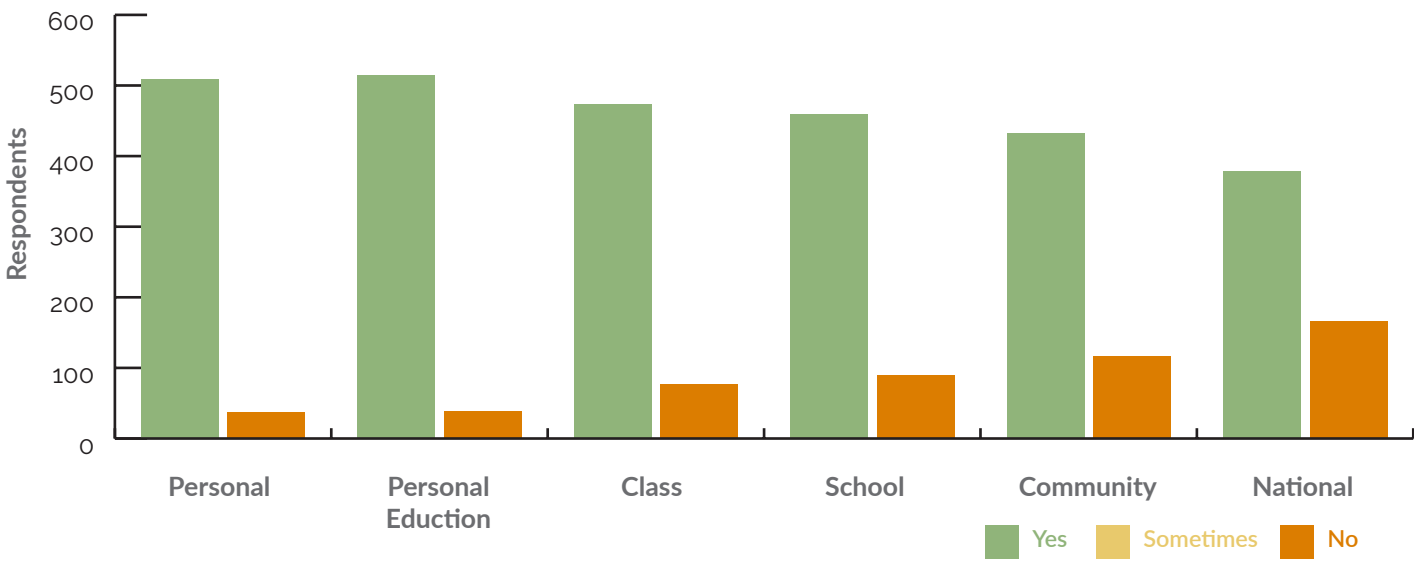
**National:**

who is head of education, how long school lasts, curriculum, policy.

**Q:** From the categories above what areas do feel you can currently have an influence on?



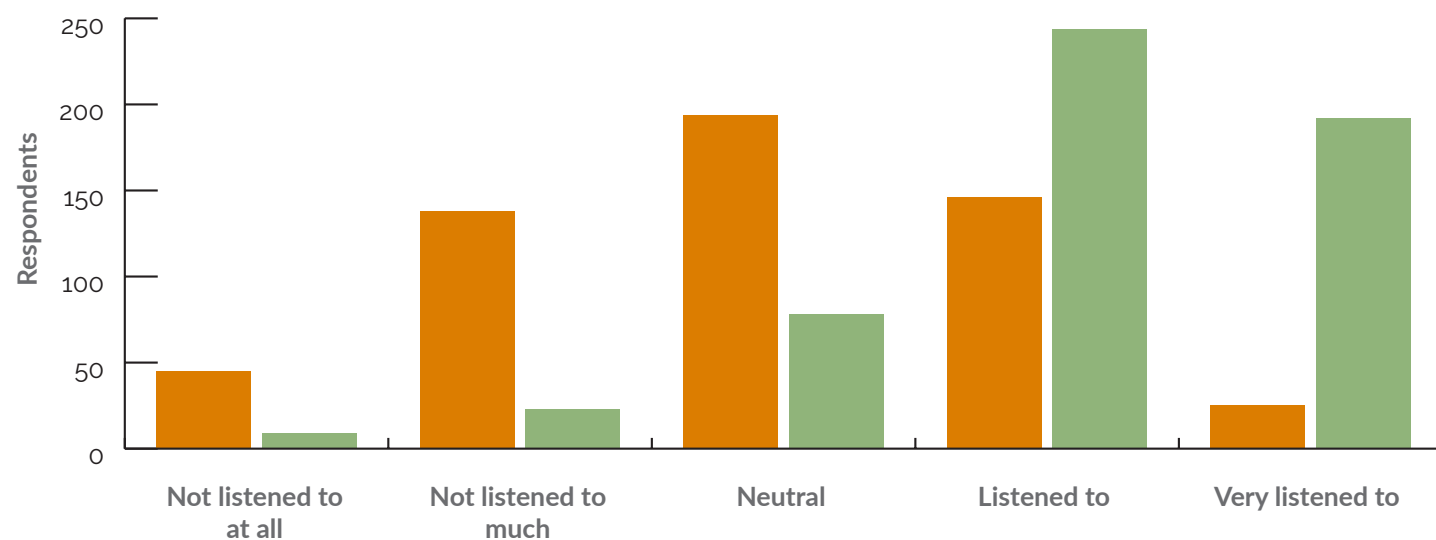
**Q:** What type of decisions would you like to have an influence on?



Comparing the two questions it shows that young people feel they have the power to influence some of the decisions that personally affect them and their own education. However, opinions are mixed when it comes to being able to influence their surroundings and what is being provided to them in class, school and the community. On a wider scale though young people do not currently feel they can affect change on a national level.

What is interesting is the progression of areas in the second graph showing that almost one third of the young people are not too interested in having an influence at a national level.

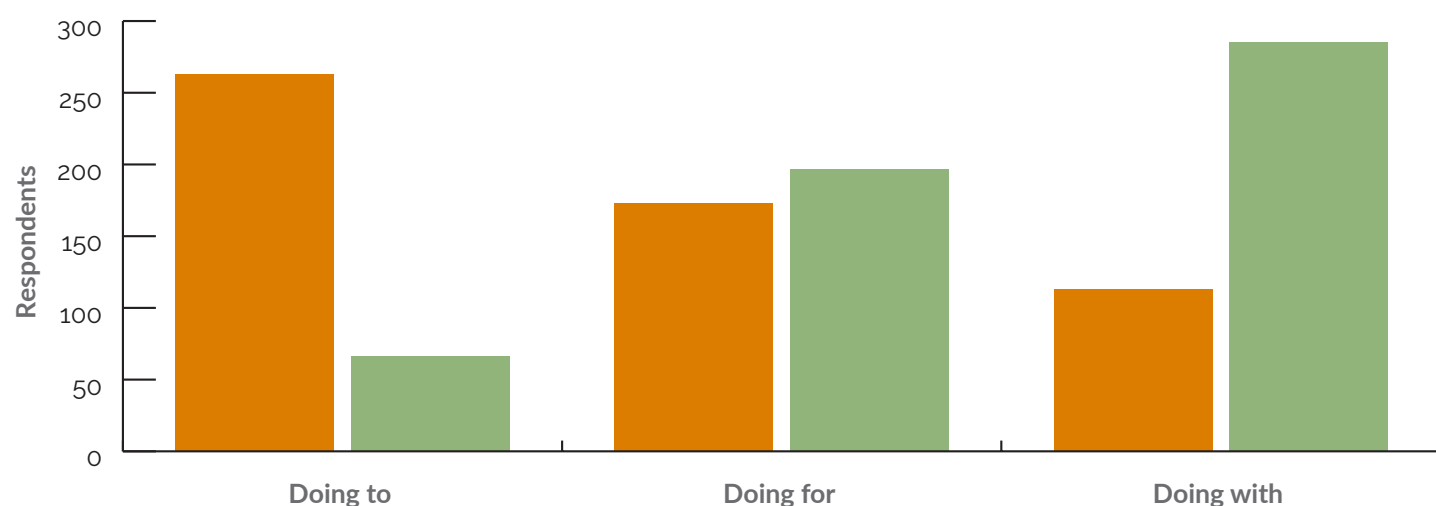
**Q:** How much **do you feel/would you like** to be listened to in relation to education?



Comparing the two questions shows that there is a wide variation in young people's perception of how much they are listened to. However, across the board young people feel that they would like to be listened to more than they currently are.

**Q:** How would **you describe** how young people, schools and government work together when changes are made to education in Scotland?

**Q:** How would **you as a young person like** to work with schools and the government when changes are being made to education in Scotland?



**Doing to** - being told what is best for education and having it made better for you

**Doing for** - engaging and involving people before the changes are made

**Doing with** - designing and making change together and adding in throughout the process

When the two questions above are compared it is clear that young people have an appetite for designing and making changes together with schools and government going forward. At the moment they believe they are currently being told what is best for them.

# Observations

Ahead of the insight day the project partners correlated the observations below. These observations were salient through all the engagement sessions and were presented to young people to discuss and refine further.

- Young people enjoy feeling like they belong to their school communities. How can we develop this community spirit further?
- We need to develop the relationship between state schools and private schools.
- We want the local community to be more involved with schools.
- Closer community links could help increase outdoor learning opportunities for children and young people.
- Why does funding stop community and school partnerships? Is there a way to solve this?
- There needs to be a fair way of funding/splitting resources.
- Schools need to be more democratic.
- Learning environments need to be fair.
- We need to be introduced to more cultures to ensure diversity in education.
- Effective pupil councils are paramount.
- We need practical steps in schools to make sure all young people feel involved in decision-making in schools.
- [These kinds of] workshops...work!
- The Cabinet Secretary should have regular meaningful contact with children and young people to help understanding of politics and education.
- Children and young people want to make more decisions about curriculum development.
- Children and young people want to be involved in ALL stages of decision-making in schools. Including being given appropriate knowledge and understanding of aspects of education.
- Quality feedback is essential.
- Praising all children and young people for their own personal achievements (not just academic or sporting) will help raise attainment.
- More open dialogue about mental health.
- Consider having a mental health ambassador in schools.
- School needs to be less stressful!
- Young people need support with studying and relaxing with study support opportunities being more relaxed than classes.
- Children will have their needs met if schools and parents have a closer relationship.
- Peer support can have a very positive impact on children and young people's health and wellbeing e.g. buddy system, peer subject support, support groups...what else?
- Teachers need support to offer more individualised support for pupils. Who can help the teachers?
- What should more individualised support for children and young people look like in school?
- We need to 'geography-proof' learning. Everyone needs the same access to opportunities, regardless of where they live.
- Schools should support the use of technology in and out of school.







# Insight Day

The insight day took place at Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh on 20th December 2016. This was an opportunity for the three partners to come back together with children and young people and share their observations.

The 30 children and young people had been involved in other sessions during the project. Alongside this, there were a further 12 young people who participated remotely from Shetland. The Deputy First Minister John Swinney also attended to hear ideas from the participants.

The first part of the session involved hearing from an MSYP who shared the observations. A subset of these observations were then used as starting points for rapid idea generation by the children and young people.

These ideas were then voted on and the most popular ones were developed into short pitches and presentations to be shared back with the Deputy First Minister.

The children and young people who took part in the event used a range of innovative methods for presenting their pitches. This included making things with Lego to describe how coursework marking relates to exam results, a puppet show to describe an idea based on a fairer split of funding and even a short piece of role-play to describe the better use of technology in schools.

Following the insight day the 26 observations, plus the ideas generated by the young people on the day, were distilled down to seven key themes to make analysis of the finding more manageable. What follows is the highlights from the children and young people's discussions, insights, suggestions and recommendations now arranged under the seven themes.

## Pitches from the insight session



### Choose your Guidance teacher

We should be able to nominate a member of staff that we feel comfortable talking to, to play a guidance role in our school life. This would mean we are more likely to ask for help and talk about their problems in a school setting. These chosen teachers should be supported by the school to be able to put the children and young people first.



### Feedback Boards

We want detailed feedback when a request can't be granted by the government or our school. This would show that student's views are respected and encourage more young people to put forward their suggestions. An 'update board' could be used to show the journey of a question/suggestion as it progresses through decision making process.



### 40% Coursework

We want a minimum of 40% course work to count towards our final grade. Pupils would do their exams in January and having received their results would know the grade they needed to achieve over the coming months. Coursework would be made up of classroom tests, project work and teachers view of knowledge. By doing this it would reduce the pressure and stress on pupils around exam time and the emphasis put on one exam.



### Democratic School

We want a democratically elected school government made up of pupils who can advise and make decisions on behalf of their peers. Each registration class will vote and nominate one pupil to sit on the school government. This group will meet with teachers, parents and decision makers to discuss school issues and make sure the pupil's voice is represented.



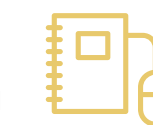
### Teacher Co-ordinating Workload

We want teachers to be more supportive and understand that our lives are about more than just education. Young people have other commitments like sports, friends and volunteering. We want to see more co-ordination between our classes and teachers to understand our workload. This would mean looking out for pressure points where there might be too many exams, tests or homework.



### Diversity Club

Young people from different cultures and backgrounds need to be made to feel welcome in a new school. We suggest holding a lunch time club where pupils will arrange a space to talk over lunch. Once started people who took part in the club would be able to support other new pupils and the supportive environment would grow.



### Same Opportunities

We want the same opportunities to learn subjects whether our school is large and on the mainland or a smaller island school. We know that the Western Isles use e-learning so that pupils can have a good selection of subjects to choose from and want this to be made available across Scotland.



# 1. Increased Participation

Young people at both the kick off session and across the others sessions felt that young people are perceived poorly by the general public and this has an affect their ability and desire to influence decisions.

They felt there is a lack of respect for children and young people and they are seen as inexperienced, not important enough or not in a position of authority. This made them feel demotivated and removed from the chance to express their opinions.

They also talked about personal factors that can unfairly affect how people view them, such as what their hobbies are, how much they earn, if they have a job, their sexuality, if they have a criminal record or if they speak a different language.

They thought that young people need permission to speak out and that young people are put off and intimidated by being disagreed with.

The stand out discussion points and subsequent ideas from engagement sessions related to young people having more of a say in what happens in schools in Scotland.

For example, one pupil council had played an active role in a plan for new school lockers. They had a clear feeling that they had not been involved in the ultimate decision to the extent they had hoped for and they felt there had been a lack of feedback on the final decision and why it was made.

In Shetland, currently pupil councils only meet once a semester. Members felt they didn't have power or time to make change and non-members didn't know much about it or how they could get involved. It was clear that this format could be improved and put to good use.

Although there was a lot of focus on what goes on in an individual school, the young people were conscious of the wider landscape and wanted to be able to influence national change as well.

## What makes you feel empowered?

... valued, respected, trusted, heard, encouraged, treated the same, in control" - classroom pack

"As you get older you get more responsibilities in school" -

**Kick Off Event**

## What do you want a say?

"How money is spent in schools, how we work best, an influence on our lessons, homework, learning outside the classroom, school hours, what we learn."

"Pupil councils make people feel empowered, by being given responsibility and/or authority, allowing individuals/groups to feel influential."

**Mid/East Lothian**

"We are best placed to be involved as we are the ones learning/impacted but the consultation process needs to be made more engaging."

**Mid/East Lothian**

## Insights

"The Scottish Government tells schools to make decisions."  
**Kick Off Event**

Schools should have trust in what young people have to say.  
**Renfrew**

"If we make decisions the teachers would probably think we are being unrealistic, so there's no point even asking."

## What does empowered meant to you?

"... being confident, leading, taking charge, being heard and listened to, as well as enjoying yourself and being positive."

## What do you need to be empowered?

"... a good head teacher, be feeling well and have an opportunity to take part in this kind of rewarding cooperative work."

**Kick Off Event**

## Recommendations

Pupils want to have more of a say in the decisions that affect them both locally and nationally. These include small decisions like what goes on the school canteen menu and having water in class, to larger decisions like what goes in the national curriculum, teaching staff and school closures.

In Shetland, young people articulated what they wanted clearly. They wanted to be able to share their ideas, but they also wanted to be involved with any new school development projects and to know when something is being done that came from a young person's idea.

This shows that young people are driven and care about their education and feel they have the relevant experience to give informed input into larger conversations on Scottish education reform.



The children and young people made some practical suggestions as to what could happen in schools to support their empowerment:

- More committees and pupil councils
- Young people on the PTA
- Opinion boxes
- More clubs to build up confidence
- Voting on school matters
- Interschool governments
- More workshops like **Excite.Ed**.



## 2. Equal Opportunities to Succeed

Young people want to see everyone having the chance to do well. They spoke about the individual needs or factors that could put them at a disadvantage. These include things like their families or the area they live. It could be their health and support available for both mental health and disabilities. They want support to put all young people on an equal footing.

Equally they thought about the financial capabilities, resources and standards of schools in relation the budget. They were interested in how this has an impact on resources such as computer equipment or on school trips.

They considered how resources are split and how there can be more equality so the school's pupils are not at a disadvantage based on their school's size, location or culture.

### Insights

"Professionals working in education must be mindful of the complex needs children and young people may have in education – academic, personal, social, emotional, relational etc. They also said that parents have a role to play too." – **CiS Workshop**

"Young people know what fairness looks like and feels like in school. At quite a young age they are aware of the role they have in this but also the various support available. It is everyone's responsibility". – **Forth Valley**

"Inequalities between schools both on mainland Scotland and Shetland, and mainland Shetland and the other Shetland Islands." – **Shetland**

"People who misbehave are sometimes treated better with more treats and opportunities; good behaviour isn't really rewarded". – **SYP Workshop**

"Young people felt that cuts were affecting their education and that smaller schools were much more affected." – **Shetland**

Teachers often spend more time with young people who have additional needs or need some extra support during lessons. – **SYP Workshop**

Putting people into sets based on ability maybe effective, but creates inequality. – **Mid/East Lothian**

Those who don't go to university and want to take a different route are not supported in school. **SYP**

What are the benefits to Equity in Education: Everyone can have a chance, Everyone is respected, Everybody is happy, People who are disadvantaged get help, Things will be fair – **Classroom Pack**

The merit/reward system is perceived as benefiting the extremes of pupil behaviours – i.e. the very good and very bad. What about the middle ground? **Mid/East Lothian**

There needs to be a shift in assumptions around gender roles – for example girls being suggested to take child care courses – **Mid/East Lothian**

### Recommendations

Young people want to see more equality across schools both in the classroom and between schools. This shows that Scotland's young people have a strong focus on fairness and giving each individual an equal opportunity to do well.

- They felt that smaller and more rural schools should be getting access to the same classes, tech and teachers as larger ones. – **Shetland**
- Teachers understanding the needs of the pupils in their class and giving support fairly. Not ignoring both the people who do not need support and those who do.
- Young people want to see a fair split of resources and look for new ways that money can be saved – like sharing text books and online learning. – **Shetland**



- LGBT training and support should be mandatory in schools - Not speaking about LBGT only exacerbates misunderstandings – **Edinburgh**
- Everybody should be in the same class and not separated into highest and lowest/streams. – **Knightswood.**
- More should be done to support pupils who are not taking the academic route after school and that other routes do not necessarily mean the young is not capable. – **SYP Workshop**

# 3. Stress & Mental Health Support

Within the topic of mental health and stress, young people thought the biggest need was having someone to speak to who would not judge and who would offer guidance in a confidential environment within the school system. They were already aware of services such as Childline and Samaritans, their youth groups or clubs and sports teams as good examples of support available outside of school.

Groups talked about key times in their education journey when they might need extra support. Exam time was the most mentioned but other times included when they face personal issues or being bullied. Other key moments include when they have big decisions coming up like choosing classes or where to apply for further or higher education after school.

They felt that teachers trained in mental health were missing in most schools and that the pressure of home work and stress around exam time could really be reduced. They discussed ways to offer peer support and make pupils more aware of the support that is on offer.

## Insights

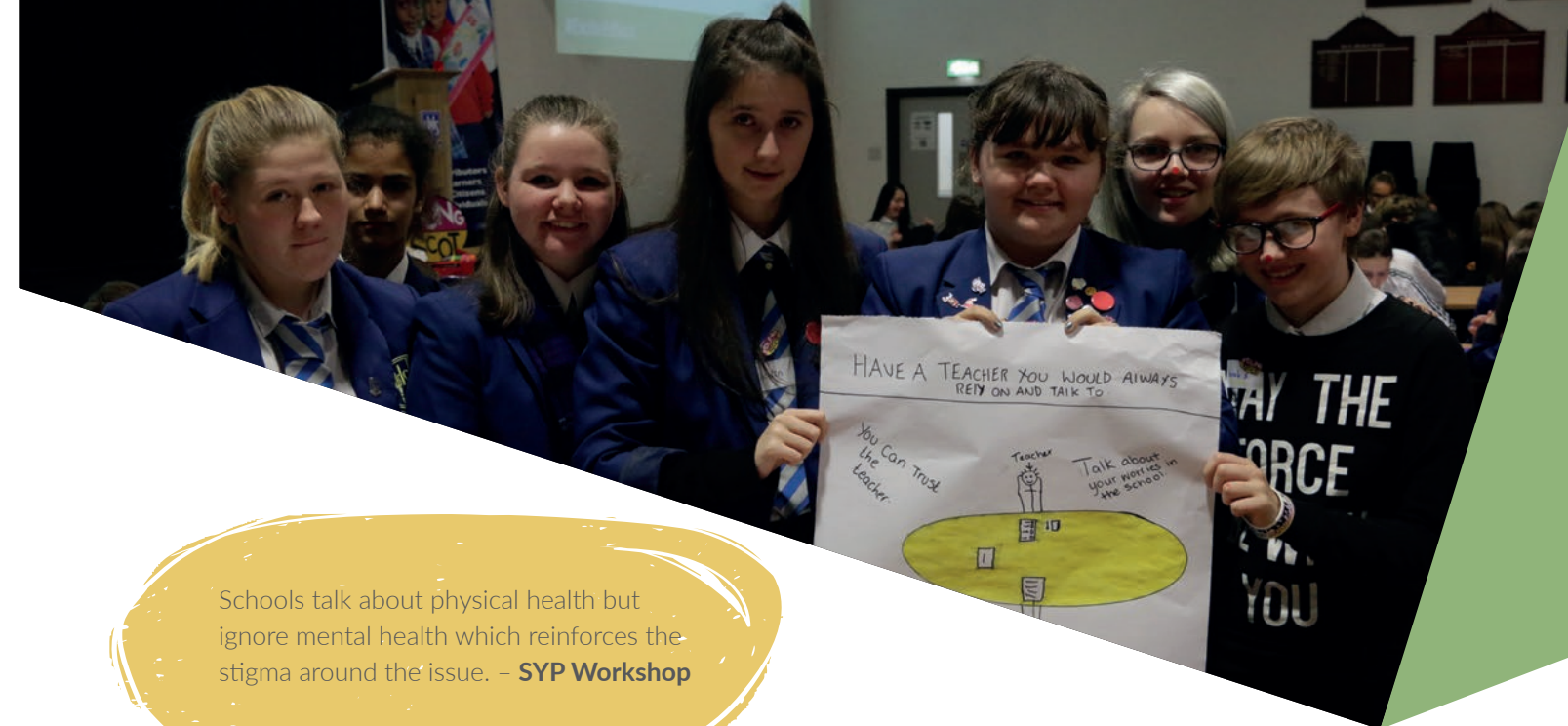
How can we support young people around assessment and exam times to reduce the stress of school? changes to timetables, support groups and chill out spaces. – **Larbert**

Young people wanted support both with studying and space to talk to teachers and opportunities to relax during stressful periods. – **Larbert**

A lot of young people lack confidence and need supporting to be comfortable in their studies and in life generally – **CiS Workshop**

Mental health was widely discussed as something all schools could improve on. – **SYP Workshop**

Parents and teachers can add to stress because of high expectations – **SYP Workshop**



Schools talk about physical health but ignore mental health which reinforces the stigma around the issue. – **SYP Workshop**

A quiet space in schools would be really beneficial for chill out time – **Borders**

More guidance teachers needed to support young people – **Mid/East Lothians**

Both prelim and exam time are especially stressful for young people – **SYP Workshop**

## Recommendations

Education can be stressful for young people and schools can do more to support their mental health. Young people have an understanding of the importance of good mental health and wellbeing. This was a popular topic across the project suggesting many pupils are feeling some negative effects from how schools are currently run.

They want to see more teachers specifically trained to offer this kind of support and made other practical suggestions to improve mental health wellbeing.

- By improving revision classes pupils would have optional support to prepare for exams outside of school hours. This environment should be a more relaxed as pupils will be there voluntarily. – **Sheltand**

- Custom plans to help individuals plan the time before an exam. – **Larbert**
- A young person acting as a mental health ambassador would be a positive way of encouraging young people to seek support when needed. – **Borders**
- Mental health training for teachers should be mandatory – **SYP Workshop**
- A 'space' for young people that is not viewed as a place for 'young people who are misbehaving' but more for quiet study time and a place to have extra support – **SYP Workshop**



## 4. Relationships

Revision groups, study clubs and pupil councils were all hot topics. Groups want to see improvements in the interaction between teachers, head teachers, pupils and the community.

When young people were undertaking voluntary work they were keen for a more of a relaxed atmosphere and more respect shown to them in general.

Understanding minority views, beliefs and experiences was a popular talking point suggesting that young people should learn from other young people and that diversity should be encouraged and promoted in schools.

### Insights

Focus on teacher/pupil relationship should be stronger, rather than 'them and us' **Borders**

Peer-support can play a vital role in a young person's journey through education. It was also noted that there should be a stronger relationship between pupils and teachers and a mutual respect between both.

**Greenock**

Teachers can affect a class either positively or negatively depending on their skills, expertise and demeanour as well as how well they get on with a class.

**Greenock**

In relation to being able to speak openly to Head Teachers, young people said there should be a clear system for providing feedback – as pupils currently feel it's difficult trying to voice how they feel.

**Mid/East Lothian**

One school spoke very positively about the good relationship between pupils and senior management. This was in part due to the fact that the pupil council and Head Teacher meet weekly to discuss action points that the pupil council may have and work together for the best outcome.

**Borders**

## 5. Feedback

Young people want to know that their time, effort, opinions and ideas are being value and utilised.

Like any stakeholder they expect to be informed as a project develops and if it is not feasible to be told why. They felt this will not only keep them interested and keen to be consulted on other matters but is good practice for any method of participation.

A greater level of consultation and feedback would improve relationships, where pupils can feel like they have been listened to.

**Greenock**

They noted that even if decisions had to be made for certain reasons, that pupils should be informed, otherwise they feel like they have not been listened to. **- CiS Workshop**

Those who don't go to university and want to take a different route are not supported in school. **- SYP Workshop**

It would be easier to understand the decisions that are being made through making the process more visible and providing channels for young people to reach out and question the decisions makers. **- Larbert**

### Recommendations

Young people want to be able to talk to decision makers in person and have an approachable head teacher who was open when it came to suggesting improvements. This should be followed with options where they can continue to be involved with the people who work on change initiatives as they progress forwards.

- Both teachers and pupils respecting each other and understanding each other's roles and perspective. **Shetland**
- New models of peer support both locally and internationally like buddy systems, peers per subject, support groups – knowledge shares through Skype. **Larbert**

### Recommendations

It is important that the decision makers feedback to young participants showing that their input is valued and that they can affect change. Only by doing this will the participants feel like their time has been used effectively and be likely to think about getting involved with consultations or engaging with politics as they grow.

- Interaction between young people and the Cabinet Secretary
- Young people want to better understand politics and through dialogue they believe there will be greater awareness and understanding. **- Larbert**



# 6. Extra-curricular Opportunities

The young people wanted more opportunities to become active members in their community. They spoke about how groups like schools, churches, Brownies/Cubs and sports teams could be more involved with voluntary organisations, business and services. They saw this as a way for communities to work better together.

Their discussions highlighted the benefits of communities working together. From the perspective of young people this includes learning from different people, out of the classroom learning, as well as finding new values, friends and experiences. It also has wider social benefits through volunteering.

## Insights

Island schools highlighted the difficulty of travelling to take part in extra-curricular activities and how a lack of ferries was having a significant effect, and putting them at a social disadvantage. - **Shetland**

"It is important to do things as a community so we can look at others opinions and views."

The benefit of working or volunteering outside of school and the transferable skills and values that come from this kind of activity when engaging with a wide variety of people was important to schools who already engage in this way. - **Larbert**

A group spoke strongly about not having any contact or link with the private school across the road from them. They believe it creates a 'them and us' environment and consequently there is no community spirit between these schools/young people. - **SYP Workshop**

Some said that school was a huge part of the community. However, pupils from another school in this area felt that their local community doesn't often come together and felt very separate. - **Shetland**

## Recommendations

Young people want to see better relationships between schools and their local community and see this as a way to gain more extra-curricular opportunities. Participants saw community involvement as beneficial and cited many examples where they could gain soft skills experience, make new friends and be of a benefit to society as reasons for getting involved.

- Schools should be more engaged in the community and help their pupils to learn new skills by working on community projects: building a bike park, community garden etc. - **Shetland**

- By working with local employers young people can get an insight into the job prospects in the local area and learn what they might want to do when they are older, as well as increasing the community ties. - **Shetland**
- Groups suggested forging more links between the school and the community through things like volunteering, projects and work experience. - **Larbert**
- More peer education would also be welcomed with visits happening between all schools. This could take the form of cross school buddies and mentoring groups. Social media could be a way forward in expanding /supporting this. - **Classroom Packs**

# 7. Choice in the Curriculum

Common across workshops was an understanding that education was preparing pupils for later life. Most saw that their choices in subjects related to what they want to do in the future. In the same way, many felt that schools should offer more options related to their niche career path.

Choosing classes could be seen as a big decision in a young person's life. They talked about different ways they could experiment with trying out or 'tasting' a subject before committing to it as one of their standard grades or Highers.

This was seen as possibly putting rural or smaller schools at a disadvantage as they may not have the resources to offer all the different courses..

## Insights

In terms of decision making, some pupils expressed that teachers do not view art, music and PE as 'academic' subjects and they come across as being quite negative for pupils who want to pursue these subjects. - **Greenock**

Young people wanting to have access to more options, but also to be able to experiment and try out subjects before committing. - **Shetland**

"Encourages you to try new things"  
- **Argyle and Bute**

The curriculum – subjects available, ways of engaging with the subjects (work, study etc), what people want to study, opportunities - **CIS Workshop**

## Recommendations

Young people want there to be more choice in the curriculum and see technology as a good way to explore this. They want to see classes related to specific interests and career paths and have the opportunity to test out a subject before committing.

- Wider range of subjects and a way we can have a say in what is taught - All pupils should be able to access classes they want to study – whether they need to travel or can learn online. - **Shetland**
- Have online classes that can be accessed in any school.

Geography can have a clear impact on what educational opportunities children can access, weather and transport also have an impact.



# Conclusion

Throughout this project over 1000 young people had the chance to share their views and ideas on the future of education in Scotland. All of the partners were impressed by the creativity and the enthusiasm of children and young people to make Scotland's education system a success for all.

From this report, it is clear that pupils want to be involved in the decisions that affect them both locally and nationally. Scotland's young people have an incredible focus on fairness and giving each individual an equal opportunity to succeed.

During the investigation young people not only identified areas for improvement, they also came up with brilliant solutions. The majority of these solutions and ideas do not rely on heavy additional investment.

They were about changes to school culture, a focus on mental wellbeing, giving young people and children the opportunity to make better choices, working with them on projects, improved equality and embedding the willingness and processes to listen to their ideas.

All these points sound simple but they will have a profound impact in schools.

**Scotland deserves** to have a world leading education system. This can only be **achieved** by working with school pupils and young people.

Scotland deserves to have a world leading education system. This can only be achieved by working with school pupils and young people. An ongoing conversation with young people will benefit everyone from teachers and school administrators to policy makers and, most importantly, pupils themselves.

The stories, ideas and data gathered by the partner organisations on behalf of young people have all been submitted to the Scottish Government in advance of this report have been included in the review on governance in education 2016/2017.

Through **Excited.ed** children and young people gained experience working in teams, public speaking and had the chance to share their views on a topic that is current and real to them. By empowering children and young people to be proactive and share their thoughts we hope that they will continue to be active citizens and take an interest in the development of services and policy that affects them.

The partners will follow the outcomes of this review and we will be feeding back to the young people involved about how their recommendations have been received and acted upon.

For more information on the wider review visit:  
[www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/thegovernancereview](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/thegovernancereview)

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